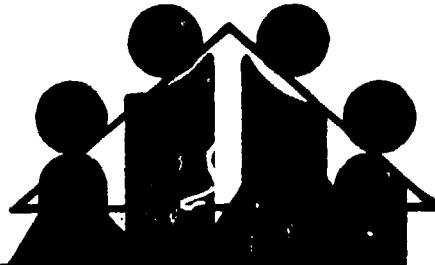


# FAMILY RESEARCH CENTER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR

DIRECTOR: EDNA J. HUNTER



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## MILITARY WIFE ADJUSTMENT AN INDEPENDENT DEPENDENT

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MILITARY WIFE ADJUSTMENT

An Independent Dependent\*

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BARBARA MELISSA GELB  
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USIU-TR-81-05  
1981

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## INTRODUCTION

In discussing the personal and emotional adjustment of military wives, a number of major issues come into focus. Just as the military organization provides the national security of the United States, similarly, the security and psychological mental health of military personnel oftentimes rests with the nuclear family (Nice, 1979). Studies suggest that when there is peace at home, there is a greater likelihood of the serviceperson doing a more proficient, effective job (Smith, 1976).

Based on this type of reasoning, much of the early research on military families during periods of wartime stress seemed to concentrate, at least on the surface, upon military wives. The focus, however, was not so much upon them as individuals, as upon their contributions to the health and well-being of their husbands (Bennett, 1945; Boulding, 1950; Brown, 1944; Cuber, 1945; Finesinger & Lindemann, 1945; Griffith, 1944; Reeves, 1946; Rogers, 1943; 1944; 1945; Sands, 1947; Simon & Holzberg, 1946; Spaulding, 1943; Thomas, 1945; Woodward, 1945).

Studies also portrayed the military wife as the passive defender of the family from the stresses caused by the disruption of wartime separations (Hanford, 1943; Rosebaum, 1944; Zitello, 1942). One incisive study examined the role played by the wife in the overall adjustment of the family to wartime separation (Hill, 1945). However, only one study was found among these early efforts which focused specifically upon the wife's personal and emotional adjustment to family separation (Duvall, 1945).

Studies beginning with 1960 began to describe the personal problems of military wives, describing them as women under considerable stress during husbands' absences. For the most part, these studies drew their samples from clinical populations. Neurotic reactions, somatizations, and depressive episodes were cited. Prolonged separations due to husbands' temporary duty assignments and overseas combat experience required enormous utilization of personal resources by these wives. The literature reflects on the many situational stresses unique to each branch of the mili-

tary. For instance, the Navy has been a topic for the majority of studies which reported on the cyclical pattern of husband separation as the major stress in the lifestyle of the wife. The pressure of struggling against repetitive disruptions restricts the role of the military wife within the family, as will be pointed out in studies cited later in this report. Unfortunately, much of the literature has focused on pathological reactions of military wives to various aspects of military life, and thus it offers a somewhat biased view of the wives' adjustment.

In a more positive vein, however, it has been reported that the military lifestyle can actually foster a sense of independence and autonomy in military wives. It can be a liberating experience, although service wives, with few exceptions, are not joining the feminist movement (Lester, 1976). Instead, changes in family roles are taking place quietly in a series of thoughtful decisions. Military wives are finding that traditional role distinctions are blurring. Young wives today are insisting that traditional wives' activities are outdated and unnecessary (Ladycom, 1977; Lester, 1976). More and more, wives are pursuing their own careers (Lester, 1976). Many military wives are highly educated; many are pursuing further study (Finlayson, 1976; Lester, 1976). In contrast, other military wives follow traditional paths and are active in wives' groups or volunteer activities (Lester, 1976). However, today the latter are doing it by choice, rather than because they perceive it as a "required duty." Actually, there is no "typical" military wife; instead there is wide diversity among wives of active duty personnel (Lester, 1976).

#### THE LITERATURE ON MILITARY WIVES' ADJUSTMENT

A review of the literature on the adjustment of military wives can broaden our understanding of the unique conflicts confronting these special women who experience long periods of stress. One might wonder what type of woman marries into the military community? Prior to marriage, she may have had expectations about

spending the duration of her life side-by-side with her husband, raising a family together, jointly working out disagreements and reaching decisions, and sharing daily experiences on a face-to-face basis. But when these women enter the military community, they give up some of those expectations that accompany civilian status, and they soon learn the unrealistic fantasies they had nourished will not serve them adequately as military wives.

New patterns of behavior emerge to cope with the new stresses. For certain wives, especially those who had a member of their family of origin who served in the military, there may be fewer false expectations (Frances & Gale, 1973). However, for others such as new brides who are totally unfamiliar with the military lifestyle and its requirements, the role reversals which are inevitable with deployments, will be unexpected. Issues of dependency, autonomy, responsibility, single parenthood, and social interactions will all have to be worked through. Moreover, the service branch may have behavioral expectations of wives to which they will have to adjust (Navy Wifeline Association, 1976; 1977).

The military wife who is new to the system may feel that she no longer belongs either to the civilian community from which she came nor does she feel fully a part of the military community she has recently joined (Dobrofsky, 1977). Even the name she is given as a member of the military community, "dependent," indicates her status as merely a reflection of her husband's status. Her designation as "dependent," however, does not always reflect her duties, for when her husband is absent from the home, she is sole decision-maker and disciplinarian (Dobrofsky, 1977). At those times, her role holds no connotation of dependency, and its requirements may tax her abilities to cope.

#### **FAMILY SEPARATION AND PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT**

A review of the literature makes it clear that family separation is a major issue in the adjustment of military wives. Routine family separation can be a common facet of military life which

can have a devastating impact on wives (Ladycom, 1977; Bermudes, 1977). Many wives manifest severe emotional and behavioral reactions to the profound disruption created by husband absence, such as depression and anxiety, alcohol and drug abuse, excessive eating, and intolerance of children (Nice & Beck, 1980; Stone, 1977). Sexual maladjustment and extramarital affairs may also be by-products (Stone, 1977). Problems such as these are apparently triggered by the sudden loss of the husband's companionship and the absence of extended familial and social supports (Stone, 1977).

One report which addressed the adjustments of wives whose husbands participated in the Vietnam conflict (Bey & Lange, 1974) focused on the reactions of wives of non-career Army men. These wives reported feeling varying degrees of numbness, shock, and disbelief upon hearing of the husbands' orders into combat. As departure approached, they experienced increased emotional distance from the husbands, as well as feelings of despair, inertia, and hopelessness. After the husbands' departures, wives spoke of irritation with the military because of having to vacate military housing. During the subsequent separation, they complained of feeling awkward in social situations, and of the increased burden of caring for themselves and their children. Loneliness and increased sexual tensions were also reported as time went on. Obviously, separation under wartime conditions created emotional havoc in these wives' lives.

Much of the literature on military wives' adjustment to family separation stems from the studies of prolonged separation rather than routine deployments. The majority of the studies focusing on prolonged and indeterminant absences of the active duty husband were based on studies of the Vietnam era (1964-1973). These studies of families of servicemen classified as prisoners of war (POW) or missing in action (MIA) show that, just as husbands were under the stress of aloneness and combat, so too were their wives under somewhat comparable stress (Hunter & Plag, 1973; McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974; Segal, Hunter, & Segal, 1976). More specifically, POW/MIA wives expressed great concern over the lack of the husbands' companionship, their alone-

ness, the problems of sole decision-making, lack of suitable social outlets, guilt over role changes, concern about personal health (McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974); depression (Hunter & Plag, 1973); ambivalence towards husband (Hall & Simmons 1973; Segal, Hunter, & Segal, 1976); inability to confront anger, concerns about their own sexuality, concerns about family roles, isolation, and their perception of the husband's absence as desertion (Hall & Simmons, 1973). Clearly, the experience of prolonged husband absence had a profound effect on the lives of these wives during the separation, as well as upon their subsequent personal and emotional adjustment.

Nonetheless, the literature offers evidence that the husband absent family can usually adapt eventually to the crisis and once again become a highly functional unit, with the wife assuming the helm and managing family responsibilities alone (McCubbin, 1978; McCubbin, et al., 1980; Rienerth, 1978). Wives utilized various coping strategies during the separation period (McCubbin, 1978; McCubbin, et al., 1980). These strategies centered around the wives investing considerable attention on the family, developing interpersonal relationships and social supports, managing psychological tensions and strain, believing in the value of the spouse's profession, maintaining an optimistic definition of the situation and developing self-reliance and increased self-esteem. Noteworthy is the finding that the presence of children in the family increased the wife's efforts to maintain optimism and develop self-reliance. Earlier, Hill (1949) had suggested that neither wives' dependency nor extreme self-sufficiency made for good adjustment to separation. In his classic WW II study, Hill found that although wives who became more self-sufficient and self-reliant might show shortterm better adjustment, it was those wives who were willing to revert to the dependency role subsequent to reunion who did significantly better in the post-return period. In other words wives who were able to demonstrate role flexibility were those likely to perform better both during separation and reunion.

Wives of Vietnam missing in action servicemen were forced to make remarkable adjustments in the face of their husbands' unknown status. Spolyar (1974) indicated that the emotional reactions of these wives followed a predictable sequence of grieving that was exacerbated by the husbands' MIA status. Initially, shock was the typical reaction which was evidenced as a sense of unreality, feelings of increased emotional distance from others, and a preoccupation with the husbands' image. Emotional release followed as the reality of the husband's status became more apparent. Anxiety, depression, physical symptoms, guilt, identification with the husband, and anger were also found to be normal aspects of the MIA wives' grieving process.

Tragically, the unknown status of these men hindered resolution of the wives' grieving process and prolonged its duration (Spolyar, 1974). Consequently, they underwent anticipatory grieving, that is, grieving which occurs during separations which are under a threat of death. In such situations, all phases of the grieving process were eventually completed prior to a finalization of the death status. Unfortunately, the resolution of grief meant that there was an absence of feeling when the death of the husband was actually determined as a fact. For those few wives who had been very certain the husband was dead, although he was still held in an MIA status by the government, and then he returned, it was understandable that anticipatory grieving exacerbated family reintegration problems during the post-war period.

It appears as though the wives' ability to acknowledge the husbands' probable death was related to a number of personal factors. Price-Bonham (1972) indicated that those wives who believed their husbands had died were more likely to have been in the MIA-wife status longer, were better educated, felt less like they were married, were more active in the labor force, had changed residences more often, and had exhibited greater levels of anxiety during the period of family separation. In addition, Boss (1977) distinguished wives' reluctance to close out the husbands' roles by their continuing efforts to seek evidence of the husbands' possible return, the degree of satisfaction or closeness in their

relationships with other men, the establishment of independence through self-development, their stated desire to remarry, the continued assignment of provider role to the MIA husband, and the closing out of the husbands' instrumental roles. Boss concluded that the MIA wife's ability to close out her husband's role in the family fostered a high degree of functionality and emotional health in the wife which allowed her to "get on with living."

In most cases, MIA wives were eventually successful in adjusting to their loss. Hamlin (1977) reported that these wives scored high on traits that facilitated coping. They made valiant attempts to reorganize their disrupted lives and maintain a functional family system.

#### **FAMILY ADJUSTMENT TO REUNION/REINTEGRATION**

The literature on family adjustment to reunion is almost wholly confined to the Vietnam POW/MIA studies, despite the fact that military life always involves cyclical absences where the husband is away from the home periodically. The earliest reference to marital adjustment and repatriation is that by Sands in 1947, who claimed that the wife may not always understand the burden under which her husband labors. Whether this is true or not, especially in more recent times, there is a second side to the issue. The POW/MIA studies not only cast light on wives' fears about the husbands' homecoming, but they also showed that prolonged separation was very difficult for the military wife. McCubbin and Dahl (1976) reported on factors related to coping abilities during repatriation, e.g., length of marriage, quality of marriage prior to casualty, and the wife's emotional dysfunction during separation. The wives' fears about repatriation focused on the anticipated difficulty their husbands would have in adjusting to social changes which had taken place during their absences and on the former POWs' health status upon return (Hunter & Plag, 1973; McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). There was also concern for the wives about the husbands' ability to resume their roles as husbands and fathers after such a long

absence (McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). The wife's increased independence was yet another issue in family adjustment subsequent to the prolonged disruption (McCubbin & Dahl, 1976).

### MOBILITY AND WIVES' ADJUSTMENT

As a military wife, one is likely to relocate several times during the husband's career. Although most women in a recent Navy survey reported that they enjoyed their mobile lifestyle, they also expressed ambivalence about relocating their households (Ladycom, 1977). Geographic mobility is in itself stressful, since one must suddenly leave old friends, splinter family networks, and adjust to new communities, or sometimes even to new cultures. With ties removed, wives may keep attitudes and feelings inside, and since her husband may not even be available for support, her isolation may be a source of considerable stress.

However, the "good" military wife does not complain; doing so might hurt her husband's promotional opportunities. Consequently many wives feel stifled by the system. McKain (1976) found that wives who demonstrated poor identification with the military and had failed to integrate into the social life around them, became alienated from the military community. They perceived relocations as a negative and disruptive experience. Conversely, wives that exhibited and identified with the military were not alienated, and utilized the resources available to them. Of particular concern, according to Peck and Schroeder (1976), are overseas assignments which may lessen the family's capacity to cope even with its normal family developmental crises.

Inadequate housing at the new duty station may also add to the family's stress level and further promote social isolation for the military wife (Sattin & Miller, 1971). Woelfel and Savell (1977) discussed Army housing, describing problems such as the lack of on-post facilities, congestion, lack of privacy associated with on-post housing, and high cost of off-post housing, coupled with the inadequacy of BAQ (basic allowance for quarters), all of

which make family adjustment more difficult. A 1971 Department of the Navy study also focused on housing problems such as inadequate living space, poor maintenance of housing interiors and utilities, and the need for improvement of children's play areas. One of the major problems for military families is simply the frequency of moves per se, which works against the family's economic stability (Smith, 1976), an increasingly important factor in a time of increasing inflation.

#### **EMOTIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF MILITARY WIVES**

The findings on the psychological or emotional adjustment of military wives showed that loneliness was associated with the husband's absence (Duvall, 1945), later followed by depression (Beckman, Marsella, & Finney, 1977; Boynton & Pearce, 1978; Jones, 1977; Peck & Schroeder, 1976; Sigal, 1974).

For the most part, studies of the 1960's focused on psychopathology in military wives. For example, Greenberg (1966) looked at dysfunctional symptomatology associated with the husband's retirement from active duty. The military appears to gratify many dependency and aggression needs for some men; thus, the preretirement period brings changes which place new stresses on the marriage. Another investigator (Smith, 1967) described psychosomatic disorders of military wives, including anxiety reactions, and suggested appropriate treatment programs.

Studies of the 1970's focused on psychopathology as a response to the ubiquitous stressful lifestyle imposed by the military system (Frances & Gale, 1973). During husband absence, wives may become increasingly dependent upon support services and show a wide array of psychosomatic disorders (Peck & Schroeder, 1976). Most often it is the wife, rather than the husband, who first seeks psychotherapy, frequently voicing resentment towards her husband (Frances & Gale, 1973), and blaming him for the children's acting out behaviors (Peck & Schroeder, 1976). For some wives there is an overwhelming sense of incompleteness for which she may compensate by becoming more active during the period of family disruption.

Studies of the 1970s also examined the depression experienced by Navy wives who were undergoing cyclical separations from their husbands. Beckman and associates (1977) specifically focused on depression in wives of nuclear submarine personnel. Typically, these wives underwent continual shifting of family roles. As a result of their husbands' duty requirements, the wives experienced a loss of support which typically gave way to depression. Another study of naval officer's wives whose husbands were stationed at the New London Base showed that the three most stressful conditions for submariners' wives were role ambiguity, emotional instability, and feelings of aloneness (Boynton & Pearce, 1978). Ironically, research shows that for some couples, periodic absences may be a preferable alternative to constant togetherness, and may actually be required for a healthy marriage (Jones, 1977). In other words, separations for some families are functional, which may explain why retirement sometimes creates a number of serious problems for families who had been highly functional units prior to facing the transition from active to inactive military status.

#### PRESSURES OF A DUAL-PARENT ROLE

Performing the roles of both mother and father during military separations can prove highly stressful for many military mothers. Frequent routine separations that require the husband to be intermittently absent from his family force a role of "single parenthood" upon the military wife's shoulders. These wives often find themselves desparately trying to maintain control of their own emotions for the sake of their children, who also need support when father departs (and returns). Implicitly conveyed by the military structure is the expectation that the military wife's duty is to be "brave, and to "keep a stiff upper lip." The family becomes matricentric, and the military mother becomes domestic manager in complete charge of all familial responsibilities during the husband's absence (Stoddard & Cabanillas, 1976), despite her previous "dependent" role.

### RELIGIOUS ADJUSTMENT OF MILITARY WIVES

There is a paucity of information on religion as part of the military wife's support network. In studies of the Vietnam conflict, religion was viewed as providing wives with strengths in coping with the loss of a family member (Hunter, McCubbin, & Benson, 1974; Hunter, McCubbin, & Metres, 1974). In a different sample, Bermudes (1977) found that submariners' wives who had a religious background, and who had continued to exercise an active faith, adjusted better to repetitive separations, than did those wives without a religious background.

The majority of studies on religion as a coping mechanism, however, has been through the Vietnam POW/MIA family samples. Results indicated that in times of stress, many of these women found their faiths very supportive (McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). Religious retreats, conducted by competent clergy and behavioral science personnel were also reported as being helpful by wives who had been separated by wartime conflict during the Vietnam era (Hunter, McCubbin, & Benson, 1974).

### PHYSICAL ADJUSTMENT OF MILITARY WIVES

Typically, the professional who is most likely to be cognizant of the military wife's needs is the base physician (Nice, 1979; Smith, 1967; Snyder, 1978a). Snyder (1978a) reported that, on the average, four times as many medical visits were made by submariner wives during the husbands' absences as made prior to departure. This increase could perhaps be predicted since physical illness has been associated with social or emotional stress (Hall & Simmons, 1973; Nice, 1979; Smith, 1967; Snyder, 1978b). In the research on POW/MIA wives, McCubbin and associates (McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974) stated that although physical symptoms were not rated as the most difficult problem faced by these wives, they were indeed a problem. When health problems did arise, wives were as apt to go to civilian professionals as they were to military services. This finding may reflect a lack of available services

as much as it does mere preference. However, it could also be related to a fear of jeopardizing the husband's career if she asked for assistance from military resources during the separation.

Many of the medical requirements of military wives are related to the stresses of the military lifestyle. Nice (1979) reported that a majority of the problems seen in the Navy health care delivery system are not primarily physical in nature, but actually reflect social and emotional needs. Psychosomatic disorders were reported to be the largest single group of complaints in a general military outpatient clinic (Smith, 1967). A variety of physical symptoms have been reported by wives during family disruptions, such as body weight fluctuations (McCubbin & Dahl, 1975; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974), nervousness, throat, emotions, headaches, high blood pressure, tiredness, loss of pep, and spinal or back difficulties (Snyder, 1978). Unfortunately, often the military wife's difficulties are summarily dismissed when the physician learns her husband is deployed, and may be misdiagnosed as a result; she is merely prescribed tranquilizers (McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974; Smith, 1967). Ironically, psychosomatic complaints are not particularly helped through antidepressants or tranquilizers (Peck & Schroeder, 1976), but the treatment may be accepted by the wife to avoid direct confrontation with the real cause of her anxiety.

Critically needed is appropriate training for both civilian and military professionals to afford them insights into the unique military lifestyle and the frequent and often severe stresses it imposes upon the military wife. Certainly symptomatology could be expected for wives whose husbands were absent in an ambiguous, prolonged situation such as the Vietnam POW/MIA experience, and research corroborated the expectation (McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). Where family treatment is indicated, health professionals should encourage the family members to seek it (Cronkite-Johnson, 1975). However, drugs should be prescribed only as a last resort; possible addiction only worsens the situation.

### LEGAL ADJUSTMENT OF MILITARY WIVES

Because of the prolonged, indeterminate length of the servicemen's captivity in Southeast Asia from 1964 till early 1973, a variety of legal problems for families were predictable, and when these problems were manifested, they affected the entire family system (Hunter & Plag, 1973; McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; Nelson, 1974; Stewart, 1975). Legal complications for POW/MIA families varied directly with the length of family separation (McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; Nelson, 1974; Stewart, 1975). Legal issues for the most part centered on lack of powers of attorney, sale of personal property, such as automobiles, and the sale or purchase of real property (Hunter & Plag, 1973; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974). Where couples had been able to discuss, prior to casualty, the possibility of something happening which would prevent the return of the military man, those wives were better able to handle the ambiguous separation resulting from the POW/MIA situation (Hunter, in press). In other words, where the couple faced the possibility of the man being killed, taken prisoner, or being declared missing in action (thus the wife was more likely to have arranged for housing, power of attorney, sufficient finances, etc.), there were fewer problems for the family during the separation.

### FINANCIAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF MILITARY WIVES

Historically, the financial support of servicemen's families has been a low priority for military planners. During the wars prior to World War I, financial support of dependents was provided through very uncertain, inadequate, and by more or less accidental means (Hampton, 1942). During the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the Mexican-American wars, in addition to their pay, servicemen were given gratuities, land grants, and bounties (enlistment inducements) that they could use for the support of their families. Later, during World War I and II, married servicemen were given family allowances for dependents, and these were paid directly to the wife (Wickenden, 1945).

In more recent times, the salaries paid to low-ranking servicemen with families have been inadequate to meet financial needs (Himaka, 1977; Hunter, 1979). Consequently, many wives have been forced to seek employment to supplement their husbands' incomes to keep it above the established federal poverty level. Understandably, financial difficulties during family separation can exacerbate adjustment problems of military wives who are also struggling with loneliness and responsibility for all family decisions (Morrison, 1979). Money problems can impede wives' ability to cope with even the "normal" family crises. Moreover, the need for emergency money can devastate an already tight budget and result in a highly tenuous sense of financial security.

Although the economic need of families, especially in the lower pay grades, is readily apparent, the recognition of any military wife's need to work to supplement the husband's income has been for the most part unrecognized by the military in past years. In 1945, Patterson emphasized that the military provided material necessities and financial security; thus wives would likely engage in outside employment less for financial need than for social contacts, or perhaps to strengthen her parent role. A recent Ladycom survey (1977) of 9,600 active duty wives of all ranks also revealed that many wives work because they merely desire to, as opposed to having to do so. On the other hand, Himaka (1977) reported that many wives are forced to seek employment to supplement their husbands' incomes. Along the same line, a 1976 study of Army officer wives showed that although only a small percentage of wives were employed, of those who did work, most worked because of financial necessity (Finlayson, 1976).

Studies show that participation in outside employment by military wives decreases with increasing rank of husband. In other words, wives of enlisted men are more likely to work than is the case for officers' wives. Whatever the reason for seeking employment, military wives are confronted with a number of obstacles which impede their efforts to secure employment commensurate with their levels of education and training (Finlayson, 1976; Ladycom, 1977; Taubeneck, 1978).

One of the disadvantages faced by employed military wives is frequent transfers which lead to loss of salary, fringe benefits, and seniority rights on the job. Often these wives may also have difficulties establishing a career because of the lack of uniformity in state licensing and certification requirements necessitating they requalify for employment with each transfer of the husband. There is also discrimination by potential employers who view military wives as merely "temporary" help because of the transient existence of military families (Finlayson, 1976). Consequently, many highly educated military wives are unable to find positions available in their areas of expertise. Unfortunately, little research exists on wives of men in the lower pay grades, with little specialized education or training, but who nonetheless must seek employment as a matter of survival.

#### SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL ADJUSTMENT OF MILITARY WIVES

Early findings by Duvall (1945) held that the more active the wife outside the home, the less lonely she appeared. We would then expect that in times of family separation, the military wife would counter her aloneness by occupation with increased social contacts and recreational activities. The literature offers only slight reference to military wives' social and recreational outlets. Detailed accounts of the military wife's social activities are concentrated in the Vietnam POW/MIA studies which were carried out at the Center for Prisoner of War Studies in San Diego from 1972 through 1978 (Cronkite-Johnson, 1975; McCubbin & Dahl, 1976; McCubbin, Hunter, & Metres, 1974), which found that wives engaged in activities which were emotionally and mentally productive, and which, at the same time, enhanced self-esteem.

Similar reports were made by Garrett and associates (1978), based on 261 Army and Air Force wives whose husbands were stationed in West Germany with their families. Although these wives shared many of the social interests and activities of POW/MIA wives, their major complaints were of boredom and lack of social and occupational opportunities. It appears that the overseas transition to a new

culture and lifestyle invokes a degree of stress similar to that experienced by wives in other critical circumstances. Indeed, social isolation has been seen as a factor in alcoholism in military wives stationed overseas (Garrett, Parker, Day, Van Meter, & Cosby, 1978).

Social contacts for some wives increase while the husband is away; others renew acquaintanceships only when the husband is around (Rosenfeld, Rosenstein, & Raab, 1973). Investigations have also indicated that wives may actually withdraw from their spouses in anticipation of future separations (Beckman, Marsella, & Finney, 1977).

#### ALCOHOL ABUSE

There is a dearth of literature on the drinking patterns of military wives. One article estimated that the alcoholism rate in the military population was as high as three times that in the civilian sector (Lester, 1975). The same article reported that seventeen percent of Navy men and women had a drinking problem. Two additional articles asserted that alcohol abuse is common among military wives stationed in West Germany (Sobie, 1979; Taubeneck, 1978). However, Hunter (1980) found that POW/MIA wives were less likely to turn to alcohol for problem solution than were other military wives whose husbands were not POWs or missing in action, or women who were widows of military men.

Several studies pointed out that excessive drinking may be due to the emotional stress experienced by military wives attempting to cope with the stresses inherent in the military lifestyle (Garrett, et al., 1978; Lester, 1975; Peck & Schroeder, 1976; Sobie, 1979; Taubeneck, 1978). Boredom, loneliness, changing roles, depression, resentment, nervousness, and an attempt to forget troubles were cited as the reasons for wives' resorting to alcohol.

The literature also addresses the social context in which the drinking problems of military wives arise. In one study, military wives associated the regularity of their drinking to their social life and participation in military functions (Sobie, 1979). Wives cited other reasons for drinking, such as sociability, fre-

quent celebrations, the "polite thing to do," forgetting troubles, and calming the nerves (Garrett, et al., 1978). The heaviest drinkers were those wives whose husbands were away on temporary duty assignment, at which time the wives suffered extreme boredom (Sobie, 1979). Increased alcohol use may also be attributed to the easy accessibility and low cost of liquor for military family members. The personal and social consequences of alcoholism for the military wives go far beyond the marital discord associated with it (Lester, 1975). Even when military wives recognize they have a drinking problem and know they should seek professional help, they may not. They often refrain from asking for assistance to protect their husbands' careers, as well as to avoid public disapproval (Garrett, et al., 1978; Lester, 1976; Sobie, 1979).

Although alcohol rehabilitation programs abound within the military, some are closed to dependents. Paradoxically, those programs that are open to help wives and family members often have difficulty finding dependent patients who actively seek help (Lester 1975). To date there is little evidence that the provision or utilization of alcohol rehabilitation services are either efficient or effective.

#### CONCLUSION

This review of the literature on the personal and emotional adjustment of military wives examined some of the unique stresses that confront them and affect their day-to-day functioning. Although past studies abound in dysfunctional coping responses of wives to the stresses of military living, underscored in much of the literature are the remarkable resiliency and adaptability of these wives. In today's military, the wives are no longer "passive dependents," as noted by Dr. Hamilton McCubbin in a recent keynote address at a 1981 Army conference on families; they are indeed independent dependents.

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